

The Killing Moon by philomendron (tetrapteryx)

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Summary:

After the showdown with the Mind-Flayer, Steve discovers something strange in the woods. When efforts to catch the creatures result in him getting bit, he has to learn to control his newfound powers - and quickly, before anyone else gets infected.

[Featuring demo-wolves, gratuitous Teen Wolf (1985) references and a whole host of monsters.]

1. Chapter 1

It hasn't escaped Steven's notice that the last two times Hawkins lurched its way through a near-apocalyptic crisis, he was called in as a second-stringer.

He's not like Jonathan and Nancy, monster hunters extraordinaire, who set a Rube Goldberg-style trap for an inter-dimensional creature in Byers' childhood living room. Or how about their repeat performance a year later, when they became private-investigators-slash-muckrakers, securing something approaching closure for Barb's parents while simultaneously pulling the plug on the sketchy lab posing as the Department of Energy.

And, yeah, he's helped both times. But in each case it was pure chance. He *happened* to go to the Byers house to apologize when Jonathan and Nancy put their plan into action. It was a *coincidence* that he was going to the Wheeler's with a fistful of roses when Dustin rolled up, desperate for another pair of hands (and maybe a nail-studded baseball bat) to track down his wayward demoslug.

So, he figures he's got to step up his game.

The first step to that is making sure he's not only in the know when the shit hits the fan, but also ensuring that he knows precisely where each of his kids are when it happens. The second part is easy to achieve. A trip to Radioshack for a spare walkie and a couple afternoons with Dustin practicing his airwave etiquette and suddenly has a line to five teenagers, all of them apparently willing to overlook the strangeness of hanging out with an eighteen year old in return for unlimited rides around town.

His first goal requires a more proactive approach. He spends late nights biking looping trails across town, a carefully constructed path that takes him by important landmarks of Hawkins' slide into the strange. There's the Wheeler house, which creates a domino effect: Henderson, Sinclair, Byers and Hargrove, not to mention the copse of trees near his house where Nancy found her way into the upside down and the long stretch of road the kids call *Mirkwood*.

He tells himself that if he can't spend his nights sleeping, he might as well get some exercise in. He leaves the bat at home, but clips the walkie onto his belt and jams a flashlight into his pocket. He also palms a canister of bear mace, just in case.

Most nights are quiet, like this one. Steve hums tunelessly as he bikes up Cornwallis, feet relaxed on the pedals as he coasts down a small hill.

The air's starting to lose the crisp sharpness of winter, snow mounds receding back into the earth as Hawkins hovers on the edge of change. The moon hangs full and low over the skyline, reflecting silver on the wet roads and the chrome of his father's old Schwinn.

Steve has the barest notes of one of Jonathan's songs in his head, a fragment caught months ago while he waited for Jon and Nance to exit the former's rusted Galaxie in the high school parking lot. "Under a blue moon I saw you," he croons to an invisible audience, steering the bike back and forth into a series of wide turns as his lone headlight shears through the night, "So soon you'll take me."

He tries to remember the rest of the words, but they're not forthcoming. He crosses under the path of a street light and tries to see if he can hold his breath until the next light. The breath nervously wooshes out of him as thick, old growth forest hemms him in on either side so he veers into the middle of the road until he's riding the dividing line.

As he crests another hill, he sees the dark shape of deer moving across the road. He slows down as he approaches, the light of his bike lamp reflected in their wide, liquid eyes. It must be a whole herd of them, staring anxiously in his direction as he slides to a stop a dozen feet away.

Their breath fogs the air as they continue to stare at him, eerily still. Steve counts five, six, seven deer before clapping twice, loudly. "Alright ladies," he shouts in an eerie impression of his basketball coach, causing several of the deer to jerk in place and dance a few

steps back. “You don’t have to leave but you can’t stay here. I’ve got places to go and people to see.”

He’s drawing in breath for his next shout when a low, growling shape darts across the road behind the herd. It’s the only moment of peace they have more shapes join the fray, immaterial in the darkness except for the fluorescent glint of their eyes and fanged grins as they pass in the light of Steve’s bike lamp, sending the herd scattering into the wood.

Steve doesn’t even pause to think before he drags his bike over to the shoulder and leaps into the underbrush after them. He knows coyotes, he thinks as he flounders over a log, ears pricked to the sounds of thundering hooves and panicked bleating. Coyotes in Hawkins make sketch out their lives eating garbage and roadkill. Those shapes were nothing but hunters; too big, too muscular and oddly proportioned in the dark to be just coyotes.

He stops in the shadow of a warped maple to catch his breath, fishing his can of mace out of his pocket. There’s sounds of a struggle, thrashing interspersed with guttural barks in the distance and slowly creeps in the direction of the noise, finger on the aerosol trigger.

The woods are dark and deep, night-birds silenced by the frenzy of motion and sudden chaos. Steve tries and fails to repress a shiver, cold sweat beading on his temples as he comes to the edge of a small clearing. The herd is gone, but the grass is stamped flat in places and dotted with blood. Steve crouches and waits.

There’s no movement in the brush around him, no growling. Nothing stirs except for what’s swept up by the faint breeze. He waits, and waits some more, fingers tapping impatiently as he scans the woods around him. Finally, with a curse, he steps out into the clearing and follows the blood trail.

“Where’d you go?” he mutters as he swipes his fingers through a puddle as he struggles to extricate and click on his flashlight one-handed. His fingertips are red in the light, not the black ichor that he’s come to associate with creatures of the upside down.

He keeps the flashlight on as he scans the ground around him,

following the signs of chaos.

The first deer he finds looks like someone's abandoned hamburger helper, he thinks hysterically as he covers his mouth and gags into his hand. The body steams in the cool air, and the ground around the body is soaked with blood and viscera. The beam of his light catches bodies two, three and four in quick succession, eyes pale and cloudy in death.

He's already pawing at the walkie on his hip, thinking maybe he can raise Hopper, when the body furthest from him, angled so he can only see the line of its spine and oddly-canted antlers, suddenly undulates, ribs heaving as if moving from within. A dark shape rises from the body on all fours and takes a single step forward, crouched protectively over its meal.

Steve's hand shakes as he slowly raises his flashlight and points it at the shape, first catching on dark fur, matted and tangled in places while missing entirely in others, exposing patches of dark red irritated skin.

He angles the light towards what he thinks is its face even as it releases a rusty growl. It's a coyote, he thinks with something approaching hysterical relief as he takes in the bright eyes, the way the curl of its dark lip exposes a sharp row of teeth. He takes a step back, then another, shiver down his spine when it keeps its yellow eyes trained on him.

He's thinking about making a run for it when he hears a deep cough to his right. He keeps the flashlight on the coydog-wolf- *thing*, and chances a glance out of the corner of his eye. A multitude of bright eyes stare back at him, reflecting eerily in the light of the moon. He fucking forgot about the rest of the pack.

Steve knows that he can't run, mind flashing with wisdom gleaned from late-night reruns of Wild Kingdom. If he runs, they'll chase him. If they chase him, they'll catch him. If they catch him, they'll kill him.

He holds his ground under the weight of a dozen feral eyes. He slowly raises his eyes back to the main creature.

It continues to stare at him, long enough that Steve grows hyper-aware of each breath he takes, every pump of blood through his frantic heart as his pulse thunders in his temples.

The creature coughs oddly, jaw distending as several long black shapes emerge from its mouth, undulating wildly in the cool air. Steve can't even move, legs locked against the urge to run. The shapes, (the *tentacles*, he thinks wildly, *whatthefuck tentacles*) studded with something sharp that catches the light, grab hold of the deer and slowly, laboriously, drag it off into the woods. The underbrush rustles as the rest of the pack follows suit.

The woods are quiet.

Suddenly, Steve remembers the rest of the words to the song, the one he heard in Byers' car. "The killing moon, has come too soon," he whispers.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve recruits Jim Hopper.

The ride home is a blur, vague memories of hunching his shoulders over the handlebars to protect the vulnerable skin of his neck, convinced that at any moment he would hear an ululating scream rise over the woods as the pack declared its pursuit.

He's breathing raggedly from his flight by the time he lets his father's bicycle crash to a stop on their well-manicured front lawn, slips in the wet grass and crawl-runs his way to the unlocked side door. In the relative safety of his home, living room lights a soft glow as his parents sleep upstairs, he slides down the now-locked doors, hands knotted into fists as he whispers firmly, "*What the fuck, what the fuck.*"

He wanted to be on the front lines. Now he's there. He just has to figure out what to do about it.

Steve quietly sits on his discovery for a week. He's increased the time he spends on his night-time travels, switching out the bicycle for his Beemer with its trunk-turned-armory, on the roads until the night creeps back into day and school buses slowly trundle through the streets.

The mornings are still cold, so Dustin, Lucas and Max don't think anything odd of it when he insists on driving them to the middle school, even going so far as to let them raid his cup holder for quarters for the arcade.

It's on the third morning that Dustin pauses with one foot out the door as he exits the car, Max and Lucas bounding ahead to greet Mike and Will where they huddle under the relative shelter of the school entrance.

"You know you can talk to us, right man?" Dustin says intently, twisted in his seat to look back at Steve. He has a particular way of speaking, first slowly then quickly all at once, like he's gathering steam. "It's just you've been looking... not so great. Lately. Not that you look bad! But- Not up to," he waves a hand at Steve's hair, which is askew from all the times he's run his fingers through it during his late-night canvassing, "you usual *snuff*." He doesn't mention the multitude of empty coffee cups, nested into one another in the cup holder or the way the shadows under Steven's eyes make him look permanently bruised, even as the rest of his face has mostly faded to sickly yellows and greens from his fight with Billy.

Steve rolls his eyes even as a smile tugs at the corner of his mouth, reaching over the gearbox to reel Dustin in for a brotherly tussle, knocking his hat off-kilter. "You saying I look like shit, twerp? That's some way to thank the guy carting you and all your little friends around town."

Dustin pulls himself from his grasp, eyes crinkled at the corners. "I mean it," he insists as he reaches for his backpack in the foot well, the rest of the Party waving him on from the sidewalk. "We're here for anything."

Steve waves gamely as Dustin exits the car, idling on the corner to watch them all enter the school even as a mother in her blue Pinto irritably honks her horn as she waits for his spot.

He drives one-handed in the direction of the high school, drinking deeply from the insulated coffee thermos he jammed in his bag. They're good kids, capable in their own weird nerd way with their D&D-inspired antics and problem solving.

But there's a reason he upped his rounds, cut back on his already-limited sleep and has taken to toting the walkie around with him whenever he leaves the house. He wants to keep these kids safe, and that means keeping them out of whatever the hell it was that he saw out in the woods.

He sees his chance that weekend, watching the kids at the Byers' house while Joyce works and Jonathan is out of the house with Nancy. He's been watching the kids play Dungeons and Dragons for hours, slouched on the couch with a math worksheet he holds up pointedly every time they try to pull him into the game.

He hasn't made any actual progress on his homework, but the kids don't need to know that.

It's just after 8 p.m. when a long knock on the door warns them of Hopper's arrival. He nods at chorus of greetings that erupt before tapping his watch significantly in Jane's direction. "Eight-three-zero," he reminds her, before taking a seat at the kitchen table to wait for Joyce to get off her shift.

They all know that when Joyce comes home at 8:45 p.m. and until she and Hopper complete their awkward will-they-won't-they mating dance, it'll actually be closer to 10 p.m. by the time they finally head back to the cabin.

Carefully aloof, Steve rises from the couch and eases himself into the rickety kitchen chair across from Hopper and reaches over to pilfer a cigarette from the cop's pack even as the other man's eyebrows rise incredulously. "Any of these kids ask, we're talking about me thinking about trying for a job in your department," Steve mutters around the filter.

Hopper goes carefully still, eyes flicking from Steve to the bright cluster of kids. They're still arguing about nerd shit, which really fails to surprise him, but it means they should be sufficiently distracted.

"And what is it that we're really talking about?" Hopper asks with a smile that's oddly flat at the corners and he flicks ash off his cigarette. He looks like he's bracing himself, but also like he's ready to kick some ass, which Steve would appreciate more if it wasn't really going against the *nothing to see here* vibe he's trying to foster for the 15-and-under crowd. He's discovered through hangout sessions masquerading as babysitting gigs, that these kids have a nose for trouble like goddamn bloodhounds.

Well, it's not like Hopper's going to get any calmer.

"How about a pack of monsters that I saw prowling off Mirkwood," he says carefully, and watches the way the older man goes pale.

Hopper takes a deep drag off his cigarette, burning through the last third in a single rip, before standing and gesturing Steve to follow. "I think I left the paperwork in the car," Hopper announces loudly and without a single drop of subtlety. He ignores Steve's incredulous gesture. The kids, fully dedicated to getting Max and Jane up to speed on the ins and outs of their game, don't even glance in their direction. "Why don't you come with me and we can look it over."

Steve follows with a roll of his eyes, nabbing his coat from where it's hanging on a peg near the door and shrugs it on.

Hopper lights up another cigarette as they walk the couple feet to his truck. "I'm really sick of this monster shit," he curses as he yanks the driver's side door open in case any of the kids look out the window.

"*Everyone* is literally sick of this shit," Steve whisper-shouts. "You can poll the kids! We can send out mailers! No one is going to look back on this and say 'zero out of ten stars, really let down by the lack of fucking. *monsters*.'"

He ignores the look on Hopper's face, the thundercloud that warns he better get his emotional display on lockdown stat, as he flicks his stolen cigarette away into the dark. "I go through the neighborhoods at night," he says after a tense pause. "When I can't sleep. Just to make sure that everything is... as normal as it can be, I guess."

"You're patrolling," Hopper offers, thawing a little.

Steve shrugs, absently flicking his hair into place. He hadn't thought of it like that, just knew that he felt *itchy* when the kids or Nancy or Jonathan were out of his sight for too long, convinced that he'd slept in late on another apocalypse, only this time there was no way to make up the lost ground, they were already gone to that *place* ---

"I mapped out a route," he says, shaking himself. "It takes me by everyone's houses and the old energy building," he's counting them off on his fingers rapidly, "Benny's old diner, Fort Byers, the woods near my house and the school-"

“And Mirkwood,” Hopper says.

“And Mirkwood.”

He just can't find the right words for it. The closest thing he can compare it to is when he and Dustin stood in the swirling gloom of the Mind Flayer's tunnels, watching the demodogs lunge forward in a wave of teeth. He remembers the way he'd frozen, his reptile brain shrieking *danger danger* even as he readied his bat, convinced they were already dead.

“It was dark, but I could see that they were working together,” Steve says slowly. “Almost like the demodogs, but not really. The demodogs avoided me and the kids in the tunnels because without the Mind Flayer telling them to kill us, it was like we weren't even there.”

Steve meets Hopper's eyes.

“These things I saw, when they looked at me, it was like they were measuring whether they were hungry enough to go for seconds.”

Hopper nods rapidly to himself, one hand on his hip. It's apparent he's working through something. Steve waits.

“These things, what did they look like. You said they were similar to the little demogorgons?”

“Demodogs,” he corrects absently, the way Dustin has trained him to. “Imaging a demodog, but bigger. A wolf, but without the weird--” he holds his hands together in the shape of a football and opens it on the hinge of his palms as he wiggles his fingers menacingly, “mouth thing.” He's aware it looks ridiculous. So what.

Hopper doesn't seem impressed. “You're sure it wasn't an actual dog?”

Steve's hands automatically go to his hips. It's reflex at this point, borne from hours of arguing with a swarm of teenagers and one step away from locking them all in Hopper's creepy cabin for their own safety. “Black *tentacles* came out of its mouth like it was *Alien* or something. I'm pretty sure that kicks it off the freakin' list for the

American Kennel Club!"

He feels a fissure of irritation at Hopper's even stare and the way he just keeps smoking cigarette after cigarette. What the *fuck*. "How much longer do we have until they chase all the deer out of town or decide they're sick of venison," he bursts out. "Or can we *do* something about it before people start getting killed."

Hopper's hand lands heavy on his shoulder and shakes him gently. "Hey. It's not going to come to that. You and me are going to figure this shit out before any of that happens."

The plan is simple. Steve will claim that he is job shadowing Hopper for work experience, and tell his parents he's in for a long night of watching him pull over speeders. Instead, the two of them will go into the woods with some guns (and a bat), track down these *demowolves* and they blow them away. Easy peasy.

Of course it goes to shit.

Notes for the Chapter:

The conversation between Jim and Steve is actually one of the earliest parts of this story I wrote, right before I decided to make it a monster mash.

Let me know what you think!

References:

* Alien came out in 1979, so Steve has totally seen it. Although he probably would avoid it after the events with the demogorgon.

Author's Note:

EDIT: Changed the story summary to reflect the arc of the story, as far as I've been able to determine it.

I've been kicking around several possible Stranger Things fic ideas, and decided to go ahead with the were-creature one, because I love supernatural garbage. (Even though it's chapter one and he's not

even a werewolf yet _(ツ)_/)

Stay tuned for Actual Failwolf Steve Harrington, the barest semblance of plot and other shenanigans.

References:

* The source of the title, and the song that Steve can't quite remember the words of, is Echo and the Bunnymen's "The Killing Moon" (1984).

* Studies show that coyote hybrids are occupying an ecological niche in the Northeast U.S. previously held by wolves and cougars. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/coywolves-are-taking-over-eastern-north-america-180957141/>